



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

POST OFFICE BOX 962, 1080 EMELINE AVENUE SANTA CRUZ, CA 95061-0962
(831) 454-4000 FAX: (831) 454-4488 TDD: (831) 454-4123

Poki Stewart Namkung, M.D., M.P.H.
Health Officer
Public Health Division

National Infant Immunization Week

As parents we want basic things for our children. We want them to grow up knowing that they are loved. We want to provide them with opportunities in life to reach their fullest potential. And we want them to be healthy and happy. There are many things parents want to give their children. But good health is perhaps the greatest gift. Vaccination is one of the most important ways a parent can protect their child's health.

Vaccines are one of history's most successful and cost-effective public health tools for preventing serious disease and death. Diseases that were once common-place, such as polio, measles, mumps, whooping cough, diphtheria, and rubella, are now only distant memories for most Americans. Today, there are few reminders of the suffering, disabilities, and premature deaths caused by diseases that are now preventable with vaccines.

Immunization coverage among children in the United States is at or near the highest ever recorded for most vaccines. High immunization coverage translates into record or near record low levels of vaccine-preventable disease.

Our success also means that many parents don't understand the importance of childhood immunization and what diseases can be prevented. Most of today's parents have never seen these diseases and the suffering they can cause and, therefore, are less concerned about the need for immunization compared to other parental priorities. However, these diseases are not diseases of the past. They are still with us and circulating in many parts of the world.

We can prevent more diseases than ever before, yet despite recent gains in childhood immunization coverage, over one million of our nation's two year olds are still missing one or more of the recommended immunizations. Each day 12,000 babies are born who will need to be immunized against fourteen diseases before age two.

Low immunization coverage is an issue that impacts the entire community. Therefore, community resources, and more importantly, community participation is essential to increasing immunization coverage. A decision to vaccinate a child is a decision to not only protect that individual child, but to also protect the community by reducing the spread of disease to those who have not been vaccinated either by choice or because of medical reasons, such as children with leukemia.

Parents and health care providers must work together to ensure that all children are fully immunized. Parents can:

- (1) Make sure your child is up-to-date on immunizations; visit CDC's childhood scheduler online at http://www2a.cdc.gov/nip/kidstuff/newscheduler_le/ find out what immunizations your child needs
- (2) Get an immunization card or record, and bring it to every doctors visit;
- (3) Ask at every visit if your child needs an immunization;

- (4) Talk with your child's doctor, and don't be afraid to ask questions;
- (5) Visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/vaccines or call 1-800-CDC-INFO for more information on immunizations; and
- (6) Find out if your child may be eligible to get free vaccines through the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program; visit <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc/> or ask your child's healthcare provider.

We are fortunate in this country to have free and low-cost vaccination programs and the ability to protect children from 14 diseases through immunizing them on time before they turn two years old. Love them. Protect them. Vaccinate your child by age 2.